UNITED
NATIONS

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Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/25818
21 May 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION CONCERNING WESTERN SAHARA

1. In its resolution 809 (1993) the Security Council asked me to report before the end of May 1993 on the results of specific steps which it invited me to take with a view to expediting the implementation of the Settlement Plan. For reasons explained below, I believe it might be better to present such a report in July 1993. In the interim, the present status report summarizes the progress of my efforts to date.

2. In pursuance of paragraph 2 of resolution 809 (1993) calling for efforts to be intensified in order to resolve outstanding issues, particularly those relating to the interpretation and application of the criteria for voter eligibility, my Special Representative Mr. Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan, travelled to the mission area at the end of March for talks with the parties. These consultations were essentially aimed at eliciting the views of the parties regarding a possible compromise to bridge existing differences over the interpretation and application of the eligibility criteria enunciated in the annex to my predecessor's report of 19 December 1991 (S/23299).

3. On his return to New York, Mr. Yaqub-Khan reported to me that both sides had shown a desire to move towards an early referendum. Some progress had been made in the sense that Morocco had not expressed objections to the main elements of the outline of a proposed compromise and the POLISARIO had, for its part, not rejected the compromise outright, even though it had maintained its earlier reservations about the crucial aspects of the criteria, namely the testimony in support of the eligibility of applicants to vote. Efforts to overcome these difficulties are continuing.

4. Against this background and in response to the calls from the parties as well as several members of the Security Council, I have decided to visit the mission area in the first week of June, accompanied by my Special Representative, to make one more effort to seek a compromise solution.

5. Paragraph 3 of resolution 809 (1993) asks me to make the necessary preparations for the organization of the referendum and to consult with the parties for an early registration of voters, starting with the updated lists of the 1974 census. To that effect, discussions were held with the parties during the months of March and April concerning a number of relevant issues. Both

sides confirmed their desire to proceed promptly with the registration of voters and to cooperate with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in this task. They also agreed to the participation of tribal chiefs as well as observers from either side in the registration process.

6. In the light of these consultations it was decided to establish an Identification Commission, commencing with a nucleus of about 10 members. The Chairman has already arrived in the area and the advance group of the Identification Commission is due to establish itself in the Territory, together with ancillary staff, in the first half of June. After the completion of essential preparatory activities, the Commission will start voter registration, initially in Laayoune and Tindouf, in the course of the same month. Suitably designed voter registration cards are being printed for this purpose. The Identification Commission will also draw up plans including requirements of resources for expanding the identification process to include all potentially eligible voters, in order to complete preparations for the referendum by the end of the year, if possible.

7. The Settlement Plan calls for the establishment of a Security Unit consisting of 300 civilian police for the smooth and orderly conduct of the referendum. For the initial phase, now being launched, some 30 police officers represent the minimum requirement. Accordingly, a police contingent of this size under a Police Commissioner will be available in Western Sahara by the end of this month.

8. As requested in paragraph 4 of resolution 809 (1993), my next report will assess the prospects for the holding of a referendum this year and will set forth the connected modalities together with the implications, if any, for MINURSO's role and strength. Meanwhile, our planning is based on the assumption that the referendum will be organized and conducted according to the timetable and plan of action contained in my predecessor's report of 19 April 1991 (S/22464). As regards the budget of $143 million, which was approved by the General Assembly on 17 May 1991, additional resources will be required to restore funds used for recurrent expenditure since the establishment of MINURSO some two and a half years ago. The corresponding estimates will be included in my next report.

9. It is my earnest hope that concrete steps now under way towards the registration of voters will set in motion a process that will generate a momentum for the holding of an early referendum. Furthermore, my intended visit to the mission area should also serve to underscore that the above process must not be seen as an open-ended commitment, and that the Settlement Plan must now be implemented without further delay.